

The Development of Africa

Winston Churchill

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA

THE following address was delivered by Mr. Winston Churchill, M.P., Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, at the Twelfth Monthly Dinner of the Society, held on March 8th, 1907:—

I must say, with great respect to the African Society, that its members have chosen a very extensive sphere of interest. Of Bacon it was said, "He had made all knowledge his province," and the African Society has made all Africa fall within its sphere. One has frequently heard the saying: "Out of Africa always something new," and it might have been added, "Very often something unwelcome." But the development of the great Protectorates and Colonies which we have in Africa is the feature of our Colonial enterprise which is most prominent at the present moment, and which will increasingly occupy our minds in the future. We have heard a great deal about the self-governing Colonies, and I am quite sure there is not any member of this Society who does not take a lively interest in these great, strong young nations—for they are nations, communities to whom the expression "Colonies" hardly applies at all, and if applied it should be, I think, with great care and discrimination—these great States, like the Dominion of Canada and the Commonwealth of Australia, and, I trust, in the not too distant future, a similar great State which will be formed by the Federation of South Africa. It is natural that these great States, where men of our own race and our own independent habits enjoy complete powers of self-government, should fill our minds with interest, and should absorb and rivet the attention of the country.

But do not let us forget the Protectorates and the Crown Colonies. There you have a field of interest, development,

and profit certainly not inferior in value and importance to those great self-governing possessions which, by the genius of British political institutions, have been firmly grouped under the shelter of the British Crown. And it is in Africa that the most important and valuable of our Crown Colonies and Protectorates are found. With the single exception of India, there is not a tropical possession in the control of the Crown equal to the vast West African Empire (for it is little less than an Empire that is growing up upon the West Coast of Africa) extended and consolidated as it has been by the efforts of such men as Sir Frederic Lugard and others, who have devoted their lives to West Africa. That important possession promises to be of enormous service to the people of this country, and when I say the people of this country, I mean all the people; I mean the poor people, as well as those particular persons who are concerned with West African trade. From the tropical possessions of the Crown, there is coming, and will continue to come in a steady stream, raw materials—cotton, rubber, fibre, oil, and other products to nourish and to sustain the industries of our country. Now all those industries intimately affect the economy of British industry, but there is one which, above all others, seems to me to join the interests of the masses of the people who live in our great industrial towns to the interests of East and West Africa—I mean cotton. Cotton is the thread which, in the most direct manner, unites large communities of working people here at home, in the mills of Lancashire, with those vast and yet only very partially developed estates acquired for us by the enterprise and courage of pioneers in West and East Africa. And we at the Colonial Office do our best to foster the efforts of the British Cotton-Growing Association, the credit of sustaining which Association in its early years belongs to the late Government, and in a special measure to the president of this Society, the Duke of Marlborough. We have endeavoured by every means in our power to extend and facilitate the operations of that Association, and to increase the volume of the cotton supply available for the English market. It is a very im-

portant matter, because at present we are forced in Lancashire to depend very largely, almost exclusively, upon the supply of cotton from the United States; and all commodities subject to climatic conditions are also subject to very great variations in price. If there is a bad year and a short crop in the United States, we are at the mercy of speculators who are able to force the prices up to an abnormal height, and take the bill from the people all over the Palatinate of Lancashire. The remedy suggested is that we should vary the sources of supply, that we should not be dependent upon one particular country, but draw our supply from many lands and many climates, so that a bad year in one part of the world might be compensated by a good one elsewhere, and a deficiency in one part repaired in another. It is for that reason that we welcome most particularly cotton-growing in Lagos, Sierra Leone, and Southern Nigeria; and I trust it will be rendered more effective in Northern Nigeria in the future. We welcome the immense possibilities which the development in the East African Protectorate, and more particularly in Uganda, has brought about; and I feel that, in order to sustain permanently from year to year the interest of the British people in their large estates beyond the seas, you have got to show them how their interests are concerned in the development and prosperity of those regions. I find in cotton particularly, among all raw materials which we need, the necessary link associating their material interests with the great developments which are taking place.

But if we are to develop these countries, we must have railways. Now, when the Liberal party were last in power, they decided to undertake the building of the Uganda Railway. The burden and heat of that enterprise was borne by the Unionist party, and borne with great courage and tenacity; and, great as were the disappointments connected with the cost of constructing that line, it was valiantly persevered with, and finally reached the Great Lake. A good many people were at one time inclined to write the Uganda Railway off as a complete failure, but, happily, it is nothing of the sort. It is quite true that the

Uganda Railway has never attempted to pay any dividend on the immense capital expenditure involved, nor will it do so for a very long time. But it has begun not merely to pay its way, but to make a profit on the working expenses of the year, and that profit, you may be assured, will rapidly increase. I do not doubt that there are many of us who will live long enough to see the Uganda Railway pay back the capital and the accumulated interest sunk by the people of this country, and remain at the conclusion of that operation one of the most valuable railway properties in the whole world. Colonel Hayes Sadler (who is just home from the East African Protectorate on a holiday) is well qualified to tell anyone who asks him of the great progress and even greater possibilities associated with the possession of the Uganda Railway. Let it be remembered that this railway at present is only a mere trunk line, that it lacks its proper deep-water piers to receive the large steamers which will be directed to it at one end, that it lacks its proper service of steamers on the Great Lake (although we are rapidly strengthening that service), that it has not yet received its proper branches, which are essential as feeders to the main trunk line; and, above all, that it has not been carried forward, as I trust it may be carried forward, to strike across to the other Great Lake beyond. But sure I am of this, that, in the Uganda trunk, the British public have an asset of great and real value, which, although it may take a long time to realise, will surely be realised, and will justify and vindicate all those who have taken part in carrying through this memorable commercial achievement.

We have not been idle since the Government has changed, and we have done our best to carry on, without intermission, the work of extending the African railways, which was in progress when the transference of power took place. We are, at the present moment, pushing forward our railways in West Africa; the Lagos Railway is progressing in the direction of the Niger. We have great hopes—I am only sorry I am not at present able to translate them into positive statements—of undertaking railway construction in

Northern Nigeria. In the Central African Protectorate the railway is advancing very rapidly. A long and inconvenient delay has taken place arising out of the difficulties of constructing a bridge across the Shire River at Chiromo, but these difficulties are now practically solved, and it is to be hoped, and we have good reason to expect, that the line will be practically completed to Blantyre before the present year has run its course.

It may be asked, why have I ventured to deal with details of railway construction? It is because I am very anxious to bring home to you, not by the fervid and fluent language of a peroration, but by the statement of hard, indigestible, and not easily-to-be-perverted facts, the truth that the great process of Imperial development in the tropical possessions of the Crown is going steadily forward without intermission or delay. That, I think, is a very important fact. We have acquired an immense area of valuable territory, which was completely undeveloped, and it is indispensable that we should be able to get back the money spent, and obtain a return for all the sacrifices made by the pioneers of Empire in those countries. It is essential that we should continue to move forward, for it is only by spending more money, and by exerting ourselves still further, that we shall eventually render, as we certainly shall, the great Protectorates in Africa self-supporting and prosperous appanages of the British Empire. That is the important fact which I desire to impress upon the members of the African Society.

There is another aspect which we ought not to overlook. We here in this country pursue our regular party lines, and men band themselves together into bodies and factions to make relentless war the one upon the other. And a very good thing it is that they do, because then the strife which arises between these organisations results upon the whole in the maintenance of a healthy balance of society and of government. But, although party tides flow this way and that way, there are some things which should remain solid and unshaken as rocks; and, for my part, I am anxious, earnestly anxious, that those great men who are representa-

tives of Imperial power in distant lands, and live lives of untiring exertion, should always feel in any emergency that, although there are different parties in England, when they look home across the seas, there is only one England, and that it is an England which reverences the sacrifices they make, and will support them in the dangers and difficulties that they encounter.

That is at any rate the earnest desire of Lord Elgin, who presides over the Colonial Office, and I can assure you that when the day comes, as no doubt it will come in the remote regions of the future, when another General Election is held, and another transference of power takes place, those of you who entertain to-day the greatest distrust and suspicion of the Ministers at present enjoying the confidence of the Crown will find that this great Empire, which you love so much, will be handed over undimmed and undiminished, and that all the worthy causes for which Englishmen have ever fought are moving steadily forward to their ultimate achievement.